

Using Portfolios for Guidance and Assessment purposes

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Theme: Formal Education

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1. Introduction

Portfolio assessment is the systematic, longitudinal collection of student work created in response to specific, known instructional objectives and evaluated in relation to the same criteria. In many educational programmes, portfolio is used for evaluating student performance. Even in primary classrooms and in university degree courses it is effectively used for many purposes. Especially it can be used for instructional purposes, assessment purposes, administrative purposes and certification purposes. It can also be used for tracking growth of student achievement overtime.

Portfolios are very useful but they're not quick and easy to evaluate, plus they're hard to rank using a grade or score. Because portfolios are qualitative, many employers find them difficult to use as a determinant of candidates' abilities. Employers would rather see a quantitative demonstration of a student's best skills and work. There is no single way of preparing portfolios. Some create portfolios that serve as a representative sample of a student's work, showing the range of performance and experience.

The Department of Early Childhood development and Primary Education of the National Institute of Education is conducting an Early Childhood Development Diploma course on an experiment level. It is expected to introduce new innovations to the field of teacher education in ECCD through this course. Therefore, it was decided to examine the effective ways of using portfolios for evaluating student performance and providing necessary guidance and advice continuously for them in the ECCD course.

2. Pertinent Literature

As the present study was an exploratory study, it was very important to define the portfolios, identify their possible uses and the procedures that can be used for development of portfolios in the light of a comprehensive literature review.

What is a portfolio: Different people give different interpretations for portfolios and use them for different purposes in educational settings. **Jon Mueller (1993)** explained that “A portfolio is not the pile of student work that accumulates over a semester or year. Rather, a portfolio contains a purposefully selected subset of student work. "Purposefully" selecting student work means deciding what type of story you want the portfolio to tell.”

“Portfolio assessment is the systematic, longitudinal collection of student work created in response to specific, known instructional objectives and evaluated in relation to the same criteria.” According to some “Portfolios are collections of student work representing a selection of performance.”

The Educational Resources Information Center gives a broad meaning that “portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of student achievement or growth.

The uses of portfolios: Portfolios can be used effectively for a number of purposes in educational programmes. Mainly portfolios are used for assessing student’s progress continuously.

According to Educational Resources Information Center, there are four main uses of portfolios.

1. Instructional uses
2. Assessment Uses
3. Certification of competence,
4. Tracking growth over time.

Authentic Assessment Toolbox (1993) explained the uses of portfolios as follows:

- a. to show growth or change over time
- b. to help develop process skills
- c. to identify strengths/weaknesses
- d. to track development of one or more products or performances

Therefore, in the present study also these different uses were explored.

How portfolios should be developed: Jonathon Mueller(1993) has introduced seven steps of developing portfolios as follows:

- 1. Purpose-** As the first step, to identify the purposes of developing portfolios.
- 2. Evidence-** Be clear about the evidence that the portfolio creates
- 3. Content-** What samples of student work will be included?
- 4. Process-** What processes will be engaged in during the development of the portfolio?

Selection of content, Communication, Evaluation.

- 5. Management -** How will time and materials be managed in the development of the portfolio?
- 6. Communication** How and when will the portfolio be shared with pertinent audiences?
- 7. Evaluation** If the portfolio is to be used for evaluation, how and when should it be evaluated?

The Researchers were able to get an insight into the above aspects by conducting the literature review and the planning, implementation and evaluation of outcomes of the study were also completed in line with the ideas emerged from the literature.

3. Research Methodology

Objective of the Research study

There are two main objectives in this study.

- To identify the effective way of preparing portfolios with the students following the Early Childhood diploma course.
- To identify the effective way of providing continuous guidance and support for students through portfolios.

Methods of Data collection

Action research design was followed to conduct the research study. Students' portfolios, evaluation forms and interviews were used as formal methods for data collection. Informal observations, discussions with students and teachers were also used where necessary.

4. Findings of the study

The experience gained by the staff and students through the introduction of portfolio as an evaluation tool is presented under three themes.

(a) Introducing portfolios to the students

As the using portfolios is entirely new concept for most of the learners, introducing them the portfolio was a new experience. At the first instant, most of the participants had perceived it as

something not deferent from just a report. It was witnessed as some participants initially produced plans and drafts for more comprehensive project reports. Some were compiling nicely written lecture notes to make a file of information for the purpose of portfolios. Carefully screening of their written pieces with the support of a series of consecutive supervision sessions was the major mechanism used to make them familiar with the portfolios.

The students had been told that their portfolios would be considered as a mean of assessing their performance that the completion of their course. Initial discussion revealed that their attention toward maintaining portfolios was not so optimistic as..

.....using it to do final assessment would be an extra burden as we are not so familiar withare not sure whether we can do it enough.

Student daily note.

At the beginning, they believed that final assessment would be better only with the generally accepted way, other than considering even portfolios. During regular supervision sessions, it was necessary to change their attitudes towards portfolios and the procedures to be followed in preparing portfolios. That portfolios should not make them confused as well as it should not become an extra burden to them. Further, they had to be convinced on the about the benefits they would get from maintaining portfolios.

(b) Maintaining portfolios.

The prior objective of maintaining the portfolios was to guide students to apply the theoretical knowledge as much as possible in practical situation. It was also considered as a leavening extended activities. In this attempt, development and maintaining portfolios were considered as a joint effort and responsibility of both the supervisor and the each individual learner. At the beginning, the supervisor and each learner had to come to agreement on how the work related to a particular portfolio would be carried out.

One of the expected outcomes was the regular interaction between the supervisor and the learner through the learner through the portfolios. At the beginning of each monthly session, learner was instructed to submit the portfolio to their supervisor which would be carefully reviewed and given back to the learner with necessary feedback. During the first three months only around one third of the students submitted though, later however almost all of them submitted them monthly as requested.

Learners were expected to provide a summary of each lecture /session, comments on the practical approach they had used to tryout the knowledge gained , their reflections on the application of the theoretical knowledge and the limitations identified through the process in the portfolio.

In writhing lesion summery, they were struggling at the beginning as some of the lectures were too lengthily and comprehensive. But as the time passed, they identified some meaningful practices which could be used to find the core ideas of the lecture and write the summary.

Gradually they became very familiar in writing very impressive summaries giving the witnesses that their improvements in the organizing and analytical skills. Later they used to use numerous ways of presenting the summaries such as tables, charts, diagrams and various types of graphs.

The most important part of the portfolio was the practical approach used for trying out the theoretical knowledge. As most of the students were newcomers to the teaching learning process in a ECD course, it was a big challenge to introduce them to the working culture. Among the other difficulties the following were prominent.

- Finding the suitable centre to conduct practical sessions.
- Working cooperatively with the staff in those centres.
- Preparing and conducting learning activities.
- Using appropriate teaching techniques.
- Working friendly with children.
- Identifying needs and desires of children.

However, gradually they got to be familiar with the practical concerns of those issues.

It seemed that a considerable percentage of students had engaged in those processes only for the sake of doing that, but some were very enthusiastic and trying to follow the correct strategies. At the end, Almost all the learners could encounter the difficulties mention above successfully and they not only developed the meaning of theoretical knowledge practically but also prepared their teaching practice component in advance.

They were guided to think critically and commence on their theoretical knowledge based on the practical knowledge. The strategies such as arguing for and against, generalizing etc. have proven that the portfolio provided a good opportunity for them to broaden their views.

© Assessing the portfolios.

As the capabilities, tendencies and competencies in deferent areas related to their educational and professional background, extra curricular and co-curricular activities, they appeared in deferent ways at the beginning. So in assessing portfolios, much emphasis was given for the development of learners rather than the end of product. However they were encouraged to enrich their portfolios with their own specified talents.

The following assessment criteria was used to assess student portfolios:

1. Marks allocated for the final portfolio under different sub themes
2. Supervisor's evaluations on the progress and procedures
3. Assessments on the face to face discussions

Among the most important outcome, the following were prominent.

1. Students had shown a substantial improvement in their capabilities in planning, developing and improving the portfolios throughout the process.

Their skills related to developing and implementing teaching learning events had been remarkably improved. Further, they have shown an improvement in their analytical and organizing skills. Instead of having just a set of lecture notes, most of them have really understood the meaning of those practically.

2. Teachers who had play the role as supervisors also improved their understanding on how to support and guide students for development of meaningful portfolios.
3. Most of them had considered this as an opportunity to show and develop their talents. During discussions, they were allowed to share those with others.
4. Students had the opportunity to experience in working closely with their lectures and to maintain a very close relationship. There was a tendency to freely express their learning difficulties and the short comes of organizational matters directly to the supervisor. In this way, they could sort out most of their problems which otherwise may have affected badly on their progress.

5. Conclusions

Maintaining portfolios for continuous assessment is a challengeable task as the concept is not so familiar for most of the learners. However, the benefits that can be taken for both trainers and trainees are too numerous. Experimentally, portfolio can be introduced as an instrument for teaching and providing guidance and counseling for students and making learning and

assessment more effective. The following are some of the important conclusions that could be made based on this study.

1. Portfolios can be taken as a practical methodology for professional development of both students and teachers. Portfolios can be used to assess and guide learners for appropriate directions.
2. Before the practical component of the programme (teaching practice of this programme) learners can be involved in practical activities and get ready for the practical component.
3. Supervisor's role is very important in introducing, maintaining, and evaluating portfolios. The supervisor has to play multiple roles in line with the development of portfolios. He /She must be a teacher, counselor, evaluator and sometimes a mentor for the students. He/She has to maintain many personal qualities while working closely with adult students. He need to be strictly adhered to a code of ethics as they would be exposed to much of difficulties of learners and sometimes even for personal difficulties.

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